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ABSTRACT

Authentic performance assessments--when used simultaneously with matching curricular practices--are a promising development for practitioners and students alike. A major benefit for practitioners appears to be the opportunity to redefine the curriculum and guide instruction. Benefits for students include the opportunity to engage in authentic work and receive feedback that speaks directly to their capabilities. This newsletter presents stories of practitioners at two suburban schools who decided to change their curricular and assessment practices to encompass authentic assessment and authentic instruction. Instruction in both schools had to be shifted from curricular practices that emphasized coverage of large amounts of material within a prescribed time frame, to in-depth situations in which students are encouraged to develop problem-solving and higher-order thinking abilities. An example of revised assessment criteria is included: "Scoring System for Fifth Grade Performance Assessment at Mark Twain Elementary School, Littleton, Colorado." Selected criteria which guide school staff planning of authentic curriculum units at Urbandale High School in Urbandale, Iowa, are also included. (IAH)

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Focus on Change

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Authentic Assessment

Assessment of students' achievement is a complex topic, and any consideration of it raises key questions. What do we want to know about students' learning? How do we intend to use the information that we gain? How can we use data to shape schools more effectively into environments where students are engaged in meaningful work?

In this newsletter, we focus on one promising piece of the assessment puzzle, "authentic assessment," as we attempt to find at least partial answers to these important questions.

But prior to our discussion of authentic assessment, it is useful to consider what Archbald and Newmann (1988) call "authentic achievement," or forms of student work that reflect real-life situations and challenge students' ability to test what they have learned in those situations.

They write: "Most traditional assessment indicators communicate very little about the quality or substance of students' specific achievements...The type of learning actually measured is often considered trivial, meaningless, and contrived by students and adult authorities. A valid assessment system provides information about the particular tasks on which students succeed or fail, but more important, it also presents tasks that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful—in short, authentic" (p. 1).

Wiggins (1989) agrees. As he says, "What are the actual performances that we want students to be good at, that represent model challenges?...Do we judge our students to be deficient in writing, speaking, listening, artistic creation, research, thoughtful analysis, problem posing, and problem solving? Let the tests ask them to write, speak, listen, create, do original research, analyze, pose and solve problems" (pp. 41-42).

In this newsletter, we hear the stories of practitioners at two suburban schools who decided to change their curricular and assessment practices to encompass authentic assessment and authentic instruction. Dissatisfied with student outcomes such as inability to solve problems and successfully complete higher order thinking activities, and further frustrated by the chasm between students' classroom experiences and real-life activities, they decided to address the problem schoolwide. It is important to note that neither school advocates abolishing standardized achievement tests; both continue to administer them in tandem with authentic performance assessments and thus are able to monitor student performance along with these more comprehensive approaches.

At Mark Twain Elementary School in Littleton, Colorado, impetus provided by a new principal's leadership (in whose selection the staff had a major voice) served as a catalyst to pull the staff together in a demanding, yet exhilarating redefinition of the school's mission. This visionary process led directly to the development of authentic tasks and authentic performance assessments at the school.

On the other hand, Urbandale High School, in Urbandale, Iowa, began its change process differently. Two forces fused: a teacher who decided to pilot some authentic assessment tasks and assessment performances in her classroom as a way to improve her own teaching, and a leadership decision that facilitated authentic assessment schoolwide.

The benefits at both schools have been obvious and relatively immediate. Students appear more invested in their own learning since they are generating a sizeable portion of it. Student work is meaningful, in that it involves problem solving, self-assessment, and transferability of skills to practical arenas outside the school.

Benefits for teachers are substantial as well. Although implementation presents problems, staff who have fully invested themselves in the effort report a sense of renewal, increased communication with students, and heightened command of individual content areas. ■

See page 13 for references.

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From Telling to Coaching

by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood

MONTE MOSES:

Why Authentic Assessment?

At first glance, Mark Twain Elementary School in Littleton, Colorado appears similar to many suburban schools: It has a relatively homogeneous student population, and student scores on standardized achievement tests have been high. To the casual observer, there might not appear to be a powerful reason for change.

But the school's commitment to authentic assessment—in tandem with a major curriculum revision—has been the culmination of a four-year process for which the need was "obvious," according to principal Monte Moses. The schoolwide change was initiated when Moses was hired in 1987. At the time of his appointment, the school's staff—which teaches a student population of approximately 450 students K-12—was far from satisfied with either student outcomes or a standard curriculum that focused on coverage of material.

Moses, who has a down-to-earth, friendly manner, doesn't mince words when he describes the situation at that time. "We were treating concepts the same way we were treating multiplication facts," he says, "and it wasn't working. If we asked kids to actually write a paper they couldn't do it. They could fill out all the little multiple choice tests on how to punctuate a sentence, but when it came down to writing one, or putting one into a paragraph, they didn't perform as well.

"We concluded that the purpose or mission that was driving our school was a default mission, one that focused on dispensing information to kids," Moses asserts. "We were doing that really well."

He adds dryly, "We had curriculum manuals that were huge, and our teaching methods had fixated us on dispensing information to kids."

Although satisfactory student scores on regularly scrutinized standardized achievement tests could have convinced teachers that their instructional and assessment practices were better than average, both staff and principal agreed that the school could be even more effective.

"Standardized achievement tests do mean something," Moses concedes. "We see standardized achievement tests as giving us some useful data.

"But our scores didn't mean as much when we looked at national statistics and statistics from our own building that showed that kids weren't very good problem solvers. Those scores also didn't mean much when we sat together at meetings and bemoaned the fact that the character and civility of children seemed to be eroding, and that when you sat down with children individually and asked them to tell you something they had accomplished that they were proud of, they weren't able to answer.

"So although the achievement score variable was in place, we also had hard data on those other elements that said students really weren't doing that well. Students were learning things that they weren't retaining."

Developing a Mission for Authentic Assessment: The Change Process

At the beginning of the change toward development of more authentic tasks and assessment, staff agreed to focus first on the school's mission.

"We decided our mission should be facilitating the growth of children," Moses states, "and helping them improve in four key areas: knowledge, skills and attitudes; thinking; character; and a sense of personal accomplishment. Once we agreed on that mission and conducted an audit of our school, it was clear that our actions did not reflect our mission and those four goals."

As a next step, the staff designed a ten-point restructuring plan that focused on reconceptualizing curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

"It was clear that curriculum and instruction were driving our behavior," Moses explains. "Unless we treated them differently, we were going to repeat the same behaviors day in and day out.

"At that time, we went to a workshop and heard Grant Wiggins and Ted Sizer, as well as other people from the Coalition of Essential Schools. We liked what they had to say about creating a thought-provoking curriculum, and we were intrigued with some of their ideas. When we came back, we decided to figure out what we needed to do in our school."

"It appeared to us," Moses remembers, "that a change in assessment was the way to transform the present mode of curriculum and instruction. If we could create the types of performance assessments that really focused on the most important parts of the curriculum we wanted students to learn, then we could change our instructional practices from telling to coaching."

Developing performance assessments helped staff delineate goals, Moses believes. "Once we saw that we wanted kids to

perform some tasks really well, and that we also wanted to be able to assess them in terms of the quality of their performance, all our work started to make sense. Since then we have been working on creating a number of performance assessments in the areas in which we want kids to be able to perform."

The change process in any school can be slow, and resistance to a major shift in curriculum and assessment would be expected. Moses credits the relative lack of resistance to early staff involvement in setting goals, and also to staff involvement in his selection as principal.

"People should have some influence in selecting their principal. A lot of teachers don't have the chance to do that. Here, teachers were very influential in my selection. They weren't the only variable, but they had a large amount of input."

Creating a compelling vision is one way to help teachers invest in schoolwide change, Moses claims.

"Staff found some meaning in our vision. They also believed we should change our school from a place that merely dispensed information to an environment that facilitated growth. Teachers recognized that we would have to measure that sort of learning differently from the way we had measured things in the past. The logic was so obvious that it convinced people this was the way to change."

Although a number of committees worked concurrently to develop performance assessments, Moses describes the core structure as "a committee of teachers and parents. In addition, we took ideas and recommendations to the whole staff in a forum setting and held town meetings where they could provide input on the plans. We didn't go far in a committee without seeking input."

Moses adds that staff has worked simultaneously to frame "a handful of questions that we want students to have answers to. We want students to be able to complete performance-based tasks and to know answers to some essential questions that are fundamental for understanding the world in which we live."

After an intensive two-year period of work, the school's staff recognized a need for outside assistance and training; Grant Wiggins (then Director of Research for the Coalition of Essential Schools) was engaged as as a consultant. "He spent time in both the district and school. He worked with a group of teachers at our school, some parents, and a group of school-business partners."

School-business partners helped in financing costs, and community support was considered essential for the change effort to succeed. Parents were informed of progress via a weekly newsletter that was sent home with children, as well as through open meetings.

Developing Authentic Criteria

Staff worked together to develop authentic assessment criteria, which was "a very lengthy process," Moses admits. "The original scoring system consisted of a list under individual categories.

"For instance, 'excellent' was a category with ten discrete things under it. Finally we agreed this was nonsense; we had to write in a narrative form that would tell us in a more holistic way what we were looking for, rather than having a checklist."

A sample set of criteria was created and sent to staff, who offered suggestions for improvement. After those were incorporated, Moses sent it to the school board, central office administrators, principals in the district, parents, and teachers at other schools in the district.

Reactions were varied, and careful consideration of them resulted in further refinements. "We changed it again, created a pilot and changed that," Moses reports. "We videotaped the kids in the pilot so that they could see their work and also learn some things about the scoring system. After all that, we had something that works well."

Integral to the assessment process is teaching students the standards by which they will be assessed. "Before, we simply gave assignments," Moses explains.

"Students received grades, but we didn't specify *why* they were graded in any specific way. Now, the standard is rigorously explained. We send them through trial runs to get them ready, and after they do it once we do it again. We're creating a system where these will be re-administered several times throughout a student's career. The idea is for them to get better at it, know what the standards are, and chart their improvement."

What Is An Authentic Performance Assessment?

As an example of the way Mark Twain Elementary School has constructed performance assessments, Moses points to the fifth grade research performance assessment. "Because fifth grade is the exit grade at our school, we asked what kids could do that would earn our respect and be a good predictor of success later on in life. We concluded it is very important to have the ability to do research, to use different sources of information, and to come up with good conclusions."

Students write two questions

that they would enjoy studying over a week's period of time. The questions are submitted to the teacher, who helps refine them so that they can be researched. On the day the assessment is supposed to begin, the teacher selects one question. Students are allotted half days for four consecutive days to work on the research performance assessment.

Moses's enthusiasm is very clear. He explains, "You wouldn't believe the quality of the questions, which we rate for depth and so on."

Once the four-day assessment process begins, teachers observe students as they work, and compile a score that reflects how well students' research strategies were designed and executed. Next, students turn in a written paper, which must be word-processed, and receive another score for it.

The final part of the assessment is twofold: an oral presentation on the student's question and an accompanying visual presentation that must complement it. Each presentation, oral and visual, receives a separate score. (For selected scoring criteria used by Mark Twain Elementary School, see the box below.)

Overcoming Obstacles and Barriers

Moses is candid about barriers that must be overcome if authentic assessment and curricular practices are to succeed.

"The biggest obstacle to overcome is ensuring that the staff sees the reason to do it. The mission must be different or people won't see the need to make the change. The process takes lots of time and discussion both before and after school and on retreats. That's wearing on

Scoring System for Fifth Grade Performance Assessment at Mark Twain Elementary School, Littleton, Colorado

Students' efforts are assessed in the categories of research strategies, written report, oral presentation, and visual presentation. A five-point rating scale is used for each category; we present the rating scale for the written report, and oral presentation. Overall scores of 17-20 are considered excellent; 13-16 very good, 9-12 good, 5-8 limited, and 1-4 poor. The evaluators are classroom teachers, individuals with background in assessment, and specially trained volunteers.

Written Report / Oral Presentation

Student performance on the written report and oral presentation is rated according to the following selected criteria.

5 = Excellent: The student clearly describes the question studied and provides strong reasons for its importance. Conclusions are clearly stated in a thoughtful manner. A variety of facts, details, and examples are given to answer the question, and provide support for the answer. The writing is engaging, organized, fluid, and very readable. Sentence structure is varied, and grammar, mechanics, and spelling are consistently correct. Sources of information are noted and cited in an appropriate way.

4 = Very Good: The student adequately describes the question studied and provides reasons for its importance. Conclusions are stated in a thoughtful manner, but with less clarity and insight as in an "Excellent" rating. Sufficient information is given to answer the question and provide support for the answer. The writing is engaging, organized, and readable. Sentence structure, grammar, and spelling are generally correct, and sources of information are appropriately noted.

3 = Good: The student briefly describes the question and has written conclusions. An answer is stated with a small amount of supporting information. The writing has a basic organization although it is not always clear and sometimes difficult to follow. Sentence mechanics are generally correct with some weaknesses and errors. References are mentioned, but without adequate detail.

2 = Limited: The student states the question studied, but fails to fully describe it. No conclusions are given to answer the question. The delivery and sentence structure is understandable, but with some errors. Evidence of preparation and organization is lacking. The visual aide may or may not be mentioned. Questions from the audience are answered with only the most basic response.

1 = Poor. The student does not state the question. No answer or conclusion is given. The writing is disorganized and very difficult to read. Sentence structure and mechanics are consistently weak.

the human spirit, and eventually it can tire you out."

Moses admits to some fatigue. "This type of change is a long process. It takes about a year until you reach the point where you're convinced it's measuring something important and doing it in a fair way with high standards.

"People have to summon the energy to persist when it seems confusing, when the answer isn't clear. Another practical consideration is that until you've created one of these assessments, you don't know what they mean. The only way to create one is to grit your teeth and admit you don't know everything you need to know about creating performance assessments. And the only way we *will* know is to make one. We're going to learn from the mistakes. In schools, we tend to want everything to be perfect before we try it out."

Although parents and community business people have been very supportive, Moses says that parents of gifted and talented children stand out in sharing some concerns about authentic assessment.

"Their children have tended to get high grades because whatever they turned in was better than the work of their peers. But since a carefully developed performance assessment has a really rigorous, high-quality standard, these children may not be excellent at first. For the first time in their lives someone's giving them feedback that says their work is average or even a little below average. When this happens, they're dumbfounded, because everything they've ever done has been considered superb. Overall, parents have come along nicely with this, since we're not going to throw out standardized achievement tests."

Any consideration of obstacles raises the question of benefits, and Moses believes that the benefits for teachers are substantial. "Authentic assessment and curriculum focuses what teachers are trying to do. When you want kids to do well, you are motivated to work on something. You get real satisfaction when you see students go through the initial performance assessment and then come back after they've had some coaching and time to improve. For teachers it's immensely more rewarding than just telling students some information and giving them a multiple choice test at the end of a unit."

The implications for instruction and curriculum have been challenging, yet worthwhile, Moses asserts, and have resulted in a redefinition of teachers' roles. "The teacher has to become a coach; teaching has to be targeted toward the improvement of children's learning rather than toward what content the teacher wants to cover.

"That's really a critical distinction," Moses concludes after a thoughtful pause. "Consequently, these assessments have to be thought out in terms of their importance. If they're going to eat up time that would normally be expended on covering material, then teachers have to see these things as tremendously important to do. There can't be any question that if children do these things well it will make a real difference in their lives."

JAN MAY:
Meaningful Communication

To Jan May, a primary unit teacher with a cheerful, yet precise voice, the benefits of Mark Twain Elementary School's authentic assessment and authentic instructional focus have been tangible, extending to interactions with children's parents.

May notes that parent-teacher conferences have become "much easier. It is very helpful when you can show parents something that demonstrates what their child knows.

"For example, in second grade we all did a thinking skills assessment and a reading assessment with each of our students. We were able to show these to parents and point out the standard for these assessments. Parents were able to see what their children actually could do. We could say, 'This is where your child is operating now; this is where we want her to go.' "

Children reflect the success of the authentic assessment and curriculum focus as well, she emphasizes. "Children talk differently to you now about their books because they're not just reciting and calling back simple facts to you. Now they're telling us more about what they're reading and why they're reading it. They're describing relationships between characters more fully."

Although May teaches in a team of four that begins with first graders and stays with them through the third grade, she has been involved in what school staff consider the culminating assessment experience at the school,

"We're taking what children know and helping them assess it themselves."

the fifth grade research performance assessment.

She says that teachers' roles in that assessment clearly show the curricular change at the school, a change that has reshaped teachers' roles. "We're here as coaches. In other words, we preview children's questions and help formulate them into useable form. If they bring us three ideas; we work one-on-one with them until those ideas are refined. When we choose one question for use in the actual assessment, we try to choose the one that will have the most meaning for the child. We don't," she adds carefully, "have an attitude that we want them to miss. We want them to do as well as they can to show what they know."

Last year's student-developed questions, May says, were "fascinating in their scope. One child explored the causes of World War II and realized he needed to go back to the pre-World War I era. Another student studied blindness and how seeing-eye dogs are trained. She asked how we discovered that dogs could help people."

Teachers work together to evaluate each fifth grader's research performance assessment, allocating approximately 40 minutes per child. Aspects of the child's performance are rated on scoring sheets; at the conclusion of the assessment, teachers meet to discuss each child's performance.

Staff also work collaboratively to develop other assessment criteria, such as those used for formulative assessments. May explains that teachers worked last summer on assessments for third and fifth grade writing and reading.

Scoring criteria for content and style on writing assessments at the third and fifth grade included whether students stated an opinion, provided strong support for his/her position, established relationships between ideas, and used expressive, strong language.

May adds, "We also developed a scoring rubric for language conventions. We asked if the writer varied word order and type as well as length of sentences, if he or she used correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization."

Staff then worked on developing a rubric for the writing process, which is part of the curriculum, asking whether students had submitted a rough draft that included revisions, editing, and a final draft.

"Those," May explains, "became our scoring rubrics in three different areas. Developing them took five days, plus a lot of hard work and polishing."

What about group dynamics during development of the rubrics? Did the group elect a leader? May replies thoughtfully, "We found that one person emerged as the leader, acting as the record keeper and processor of group dynamics. That person would say, 'We're not getting enough done. Let's break it down and divide into small groups,' where one or two people might work on the rubric for the writing process.

"But the first two days of the process we were totally immersed in major questions. We asked: What is it that we want to assess? How do we want to assess it?"

Collegiality throughout the process was high, May observes. "The ideas we discussed were consensus ideas. We really agreed or we didn't agree. When someone didn't agree, it was very easy to discuss both the pros and cons. And we didn't continue until we reached consensus."

Now that authentic assessment is part of every classroom at Mark Twain Elementary School, May is able to reflect on some of the more problematic aspects of implementation. "At first we continued to try to teach all the little pieces, and we didn't look at our instruction as a whole. Until you actually go through these assessments with your students and recognize what they do know, then your focus changes to what you need to teach and what will help students the most. You realize they don't need all the tiny skills pieces."

Benefits to students are clear, May insists. "This puts real meaning into students' work. They are looking much more critically at what they read and write."

Authentic assessment helps teachers, she suggests, by "focusing the curriculum, focusing *what* we need to teach and *how* we need to teach. It's far more interesting than just teaching skills. It's enjoyable to work with students one on one. We're not giving handouts anymore; we're coaching children. We're taking what they know and helping them assess it themselves."

May acknowledges that there is no blueprint for implementation. "First you have to understand what authentic assessment is. Then you have to do it. If you don't go through those steps, if you take what I hand you, it won't be yours. It will just be another sheet of paper. Once you own what you're doing, it almost puts the performance assessment into your hands. The assessment becomes personal, and your students do too.

"My communication with students," she concludes, "is much more meaningful than it has ever been before."

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A Leap of Faith

by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood

ANN JOHNSON:

Collaborative Professionalism

Located in what its principal describes as "a fairly affluent community," Urbandale High School in Urbandale, Iowa, like Mark Twain Elementary School, is a suburban school. A northern suburb of Des Moines, the school serves a homogeneous student population of approximately 850 and is located in a district of approximately 3200 students, K-12.

Ann Johnson, the current principal, has a businesslike, yet good-humored manner. She was hired in the Summer of 1989, after Urbandale High School had been working on implementing a program of authentic assessment and curriculum for one year.

At the time that one social studies teacher [see next article] was experimenting with authentic assessment and instruction in her classroom, additional support for schoolwide implementation was provided by a North Central Association study, which concluded that the school should work on improving student achievement as a primary target.

It was fortuitous that the school's culture was ripe for change, Johnson says, crediting the presence of study groups, the idea of collaborative work, and a cooperative sense of goal setting, which were all in place when she entered the district as principal.

In fact, Johnson's primary reason for accepting the principalship was her excitement at the prospect of working in a district where there was commitment to the goals of authentic assessment and curriculum. "I had been a classroom teacher and had loved it. But I wanted to be part of this experience."

At the time of implementation, just as at Mark Twain Elementary School, scores on standardized achievement tests were high, but teachers believed "that although kids did well, there wasn't a transfer of what they knew to real-life situations. They weren't demonstrating their knowledge. Teachers were frustrated by that."

The Change Process: Total Immersion

The school year of 1990-91 has been the second year of schoolwide work on authentic assessment and has been a year of "total immersion," Johnson says. "We believe that if it's good for kids, it's good for *all* kids. Therefore, developing authentic tasks and assessments shouldn't be limited to a few select teachers. Everybody should do it. These are activities that should be available for everybody."

As with any substantive assessment and curriculum change, costs for training and assistance are substantial, Johnson acknowledges. "We have several different levels of training," she explains. "Even though all teachers have received training, we have a group of teachers who are staff development specialists. They've received additional training in staff development and instructional leadership techniques, and also in authentic assessment. They've traveled nationwide, attending meetings on assessment or restructuring."

As part of staff development efforts for schoolwide implementation of authentic assessment, Grant Wiggins was engaged as a consultant and worked with staff, as well as a building improvement team.

How has the curriculum changed since the advent of authentic assessment? Johnson responds from the vantage point of a former curriculum coordinator. "We've moved from the smaller objectives I used to write as a curriculum coordinator to the big ideas. We now carefully consider the essentials—what a student needs in order to leave the class coupled with what's truly important to teach. It's been exciting to see our students work through that."

And as a curricular goal set by teachers, by the end of October 1990 all "big ideas," or central core concepts, had to be identified for each course.

Even though all teachers are involved in authentic assessment and curriculum, some are more deeply steeped in it than others. "The teachers who are really involved are working with it daily. They found that you can't isolate it," Johnson emphasizes. "Last year, one of the mistakes we made was to have teachers design an authentic final without consideration of the curriculum, what was actually being taught. We found, by experimentation, that you can't give an authentic final if you haven't given authentic tasks up to that final."

Another difficulty is presented by students' comfort level with a different type of assessment. "The process of beginning authentic assessment was frustrating for the kids," Johnson says, "because it was teaching them a different mode of operation. Instead of filling out bubble sheets, they had to go through a thinking process. In fact, I was in a classroom the other day where a student was talking to a teacher about an assessment they had just finished and he was saying, 'I really don't like this. I have to think. I never had to study before.'"

It is easier to gain an accurate

measure of what students have achieved through authentic assessment, Johnson believes. She suggests it provides a more even-handed means of assessing what students actually know, although Urbandale continues to use and carefully monitor standardized achievement tests along with authentic performance assessments.

Johnson adds that the traditional grading system—as well as a standard curriculum that focuses on coverage of material—does not accurately reflect students' achievement.

"When I was a classroom teacher, some of my best students did not get the best grades. The kids who got the best grades knew how to play the game; they knew how to shake out a grade. If you gave them a test where they had to reason, to problem-solve, they were extremely uncomfortable."

Overcoming Obstacles and Barriers

Because secondary schools are typically organized into content spheres, teachers establish and maintain roles as content authorities. Such roles, especially when combined with traditional teaching methods of lecture, recitation, and worksheets, may prove difficult to relinquish. Has that indeed been the case at Urbandale?

Johnson pauses to reflect before answering. "Some of the resistance we still have," she answers, "is rooted in the fact that it *is* hard to relinquish that role. But teachers who have experienced success with authentic assessment are transformed. They see how much more involved and engaged their students have become. Until you've had that first success with it, it's somewhat difficult to get really excited."

And Johnson shows empathy for the roots of resistance. "I think that the majority of people who resist, with the exception of a few reticent individuals, are afraid. They need you to take them through it step by step. If it means that I have to go into their classrooms and actually teach a lesson and model how to do it, I'll do it. We have brought some people on board that way. I also think that it's necessary to really reward successes, even the little ones at the beginning."

Other resistance has occasionally come from parents who are inadequately informed, Johnson says. "We're trying to wage this effort as a political campaign. In all honesty, we were better about it last year. Last year we tried to keep information in front of parents, putting articles in our newsletters and so on. This year, we've been so involved in what we're doing, we haven't done as much. However, we have put up bulletin boards and done some showcases on assessments."

Basic objections from parents stem from inadequate or confused information, Johnson believes. "Parents may be getting a mixed message. A student might come home and say she got a group grade and for some reason tie that in with authentic assessment. Then a parent might ask me why teachers are giving group grades in authentic assessment. We are not doing that. There may be, in fact, a teacher who's given a group grade using cooperative learning. And I think there are a few people in the building who are not as supportive of this effort, perhaps because their knowledge base is not as high."

Putting resistance and lack of knowledge aside, what other obstacles might a secondary school experience when attempting to establish authentic assessment?

"One of the biggest obstacles," Johnson replies without hesitation, "is keeping the focus and momentum going. I must say that if I were in another school district, it is hard for me to imagine being able to do this if the culture weren't ready for it. If you have collaborative professionalism, it helps. You, as principal, have to believe your teachers are professionals. Secondly, you have to ensure that your budget is focused on this because if you start piecemealing it, you will lose what you've accomplished. You have to monitor what you're doing all the time. And you have to listen.

"If people are talking negatively, you've got to be out there all the time. Lots of times after a study group meeting, we'll ask teachers to fill out a brief survey to find out what concerns they

Authentic Curriculum Unit Planning at Urbandale High School, Urbandale, Iowa

These selected criteria guide school staff in planning curriculum units:

1. The unit speaks to the essential questions of the course.
2. The unit includes "real world" tasks.
3. Unit tasks are well structured, allowing the student to use "habits of mind" in solving a problem.
4. Unit tasks are accompanied by criteria and standards clearly defined and "demystified" for the student.
5. Unit tasks are engaging and involve students in work they perceive as important and relevant; they involve a product or performance.

have. For instance, we might ask what additional training would be helpful."

Are teachers' efforts supported by a regular program of observation and feedback? "That's one area where I feel we've been weak," Johnson acknowledges. "We're trying to set up a peer coaching model. To date, we do have our Tuesday morning study group and teachers have an opportunity there to share their examples and brainstorm with each other. On inservice days, there are opportunities to share their ideas with me and with staff development people."

One way Urbandale differs from Mark Twain Elementary School has been the direction of implementation. "We actually started with the assessments, and as we introduced teachers to the idea of an authentic assessment, we developed our big ideas or core concepts. Now we'll take those big ideas and look at what we want as a final product from our students."

Johnson, who ruefully acknowledges that "there isn't a blue or brown book out there to show you how to do it," says that one of the benefits of authentic assessment is that it can be designed for a school's population and its needs.

"It's important to tell your teachers that you don't know more about this than they do. I may know more about authentic assessment, but someone else knows more about a particular area of expertise. We absolutely must work together if we want to succeed."

LINDA CALVIN:
A Better Way to Teach

To Linda Calvin, a former Iowa State Teacher of the Year, authentic assessment—in its most immediate sense—provided a means to develop her own teaching. Calvin, who teaches American history, philosophy, and economics at Urbandale High School in Urbandale, Iowa, says that her interest in authentic assessment and curriculum was "selfish" at first.

"My teaching was all right in that I was trying to do creative things with students that involved problem solving, research, and higher order thinking, but when it came to evaluation I was still giving bubble tests. I was also making a key mistake: I was the primary information giver."

As part of her award as 1986 Iowa State Teacher of the Year, Calvin atttended a conference with the other state teachers-of-the-year at which some of the concepts central to the notion of authentic assessment were discussed. She returned to her school with a sense of renewal, but saw no immediate possibilities for schoolwide change.

But two years ago a North Central Association study pointed out some goals for the school that reinforced some of those original concepts, and coincidentally Calvin and her associate superintendent attended a conference and heard more discussion of authentic assessment.

The Change Process: One Teacher's Role

The NCA study, coupled with a growing awareness of authentic assessment and authentic curriculum, prompted a meeting between Calvin, the superintendent, the principal, and the curriculum coordinator.

Calvin remembers "lobbying" for what Urbandale High School since has called authentic curriculum and evaluation (ACE), which resulted in Calvin returning to her classroom to pilot it while other teachers became oriented to the basics.

She confesses disarmingly, "I wasn't for or against schoolwide involvement. I was mostly interested in what I could do in my own classroom. However, the administration perceived that it would be a greater advantage if the entire high school taught authentic curriculum, so they set a goal. Every teacher in the school was required to give two 'authentic' exams."

Contrary to the lengthy staff involvement process at Mark Twain Elementary School, the program was "somewhat directed" at Urbandale High School, Calvin admits, although staff resistance has not been particularly high.

"This year the faculty had almost total input and chose to proceed with it. At this time, there is less direction from the administration."

To what degree did faculty resist change? "We all know enough about the research on change," Calvin says bluntly, "to know that there are people who are gung ho and go straight ahead. Then you have the 'wait and see-ers' and also the ones who are never going to come aboard. We have those three divisions here. But *anyone* would have to admit that it's a better way to teach and a better way to assess because students learn more. And none of our teachers argued with that, because it was so obvious."

Calvin, who also is a staff development specialist, understands some teachers' resistance. "They see it as more work in terms of putting together the units and also doing the evaluations. When the teacher is the primary information giver, you can ask students to respond on a bubble test which goes through a machine, and you're done. A lot of our teachers thought that even though authen-

ic assessment and instruction was attractive, and they'd like to do it, they simply didn't have time to do it fully."

But her response to these caveats is simple. "A lot of it has to do with coming to grips with the idea that this is the best thing there is for kids and for teachers and that I, as a teacher, am going to do it in spite of the limitations."

And she can point to progress. "Our goal this year has expanded beyond two authentic exams to two authentic units. Some teachers have gone to greater lengths to understand this than others. Others are still meeting the goal but haven't totally immersed themselves in the idea that they will always do it."

Training—and an informal staff development support component—has been an essential part of the shift to authentic curriculum and assessment, Calvin asserts. "We have a very strong staff development program, with four staff development specialists. The specialists, of whom I am one, have had extensive training on how to teach adults. Our task the first year during inservice was to model what authentic curriculum and evaluation is, and then help teachers who wanted or needed help."

Every Tuesday morning a mandatory study group of teachers meets, but teachers seek assistance at other times as well. "I would say that every teacher in the building is involved with some authentic curriculum and assessment. One thing that has brought them along is pressure not only from their peers but from students, who love it."

Authentic Curriculum and Assessment: The Classroom Level

Calvin explains that the core difference between a classroom oriented toward authentic tasks and authentic assessment and a more traditional one is that "the teacher becomes a coach rather than a primary information giver. I certainly provide students with the task, the problem to be solved, and the means to find the material. However, there's much more problem-solving than before and the students must do that. I usually present a scenario that deals with a problem.

"For example, last year when we were discussing the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, a traditional way for a social studies teacher to handle that topic would be to lecture and then perhaps have a debate. I chose to give the students information about the dropping of the bomb from personal points of view of the people who were involved, and then I assigned roles. One student might take the role of a scientist, or a pilot, or a peace activist, and so on. We actually had one student become the President of the United States."

Calvin then set up hearings in which every student participated. "If you were called to testify, you had to give expert testimony. Everyone else was on the Senate Committee and could ask any question. What this provided that is missing from the traditional kind of teaching is the motivation to *want* to know this information."

Calvin says this type of unit exemplifies authentic instruction, in that students must know—and learn—more than dates and facts. She points out, "There's a great deal of peer pressure to come up with a good product. Sometimes students want to go back and do a project over, because they don't like what they did when they see what other students can achieve. The evaluation is a public performance or a product rather than a bubble test. You, the teacher, are constantly evaluating each student. You don't wait until the end of a quarter or term and then give a test. You evaluate as you go, and your focus becomes wanting students to learn to solve the problem, rather than recalling bits of information."

Students' Perceptions of Authentic Instruction and Assessment

Calvin likes to "reality-check" how well things are going in her classroom, and frequently asks students for their feedback. She says, "This morning I had a discussion with my students. I asked them to tell me what they were learning. One student said, 'Now I have to think.' Another student said, 'I could see how my learning could solve problems because I could relate it to the real world.' One student said he really liked the bubble test better because he never had to think or concentrate. Of course he was being facetious, but there's a good deal of truth to what he said.

"I wasn't putting words in their mouths," Calvin is quick to add. "I was ready for the negative as well, and I think that's how classrooms should be organized. I let the students tell me what they need and how I can facilitate it,

"You can't give an authentic final if you haven't given authentic tasks up to that."

and if they don't come up with it *I* can tell them what they need. However, I can still be a facilitator. That's the big difference from the traditional classroom. Students and teachers are in it together. It's *our* classroom, not *my* classroom."

Do secondary school teachers experience particular difficulty when relinquishing a more traditional role as content authority? Calvin carefully considers her response.

"If you can get the teacher to move into this role, he or she will see that you have to know your content better," she replies. "You don't know what the student is going to require from you. You don't know what direction their research will take, and you're going to have to direct it and tell them where they can find information. Maybe it is scary for a weak teacher who doesn't have a good background, but the bottom line is what the student is learning."

Obstacles to Implementation

A main obstacle to schoolwide implementation of authentic assessment and authentic curriculum, Calvin believes, is the need for teachers to break with tradition.

"The difficulty is getting teachers out of the paradigm they've been in for so many years. We know the change process is difficult for people who have done something the same way for a very long time. At our school, we have a mature staff with an average age of 45-50. We don't have much turnover. Their question is: 'What are you saying to me? Are you saying I haven't been a good teacher? Are you saying that what I've been doing for the past 25 years *isn't* authentic?'

"I think it takes a leap of faith to say 'That's right. I did my best with what I then knew, but now that I know something better, I need to do that which is better.' For a lot of teachers, that's a very painful thing to face."

Calvin believes that the dual role of staff development specialist and teacher can present its own difficulties at times. "A science teacher will ask a social studies teacher what she knows about science. It has to be made plain that the staff development person is saying to the teacher, 'I understand your dilemma. You're right, I don't know as much about science as you do. But I do understand this model and I'm very willing to help you in the face of an administrative directive that you need to be exposed to this program. All I want to do is help you.'"

Calvin sums up: "Training helps a lot. I've had good results with teachers who came back to me and said, 'You treated me like I *knew* something and like I could succeed.' We have to be very sensitive and very caring; we have to be aware that they're right, they're being challenged."

■

At the schools described in the preceding articles, teachers have used authentic assessment to gain useful knowledge of students' authentic achievement. Not surprisingly, instruction in both schools had to be shifted from curricular practices that emphasized coverage of large amounts of material within a prescribed time frame, to in-depth situations in which students are encouraged to develop problem-solving and higher order thinking abilities.

Authentic performance assessments—when used simultaneously with matching curricular practices—are a promising development for practitioners and students alike. A major benefit for practitioners appears to be the opportunity to redefine the curriculum and guide instruction. Benefits for students include the opportunity to engage in authentic work and receive feedback that speaks directly to their capabilities.

For further reading on authentic assessment, please see these selected references.

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For a discussion of two urban inner-city schools and their restructuring efforts for at-risk students, see *Focus in Change,* November 1990.

Effective Schools and Authentic Assessment

One of the key features found in effective schools in many of the original studies was "regular monitoring of student work." In most cases this meant that student performance was frequently assessed via scores on standardized achievement tests—and more recently, criterion-referenced tests.

Many effective schools programs used these tests extensively—most effectively when they succeeded in disaggregating student performance by race, gender, and socio-economic background. In fact, such assessment of student performance has been a cornerstone of planned change and school improvement from California to Connecticut, from Spencerport, New York to Spring Branch, Texas.

But more recently, many educators have redefined and identified newer forms of achievement, especially "authentic achievement," as described by Newman, Archbald, Wiggins, and others. These educators, and many others in schools and districts, want to expand the range of curricular and instructional possibilities for students to include a whole new set of more in-depth, complex, and personally engaging activities that are applicable to situations outside the classroom. In order to assess these activities, school improvement leaders must also expand their repertoire of assessment techniques.

As we have seen in the two cases presented in this issue of *Focus in Change*, new forms of student performance demand new forms of assessment which, in turn, require that school staff develop challenging, meaningful classroom activities.

Kent D. Peterson,
Director

Staff at Mark Twain Elementary School have used a transformed, clear school mission—one that focuses on facilitating students' growth rather than dispensing information—to hone classroom activities that are limited only by the imagination of staff and students. Students are encouraged to generate and create their own learning, develop questions to research to which the answers will have particular, genuine interest to themselves—and to rely on teachers as coaches rather than as sole information-givers.

At Urbandale High School, teachers carefully plan units around criteria that insist that through their work in the classroom, students will develop abilities and skills that are applicable to real-life situations, such as the ability to support a point of view with reasons or understand how to go about solving a problem independently or with others.

We can also note that in the process of expanding and changing their assessment procedures, these schools have learned some important lessons about planned change, particularly that:

- working on defining the purpose and mission of the school before any changes occur is crucial;
- leadership from principals and central office must combine with leadership from teachers to make substantial changes work;
- changes of all sorts engender resistance as a natural consequence of doing anything new, resistance that can be dealt with constructively;
- transforming activities means transforming and monitoring assessment structures;
- implementation exacts a cost in time, money, and personal commitment;
- new ideas, once deeply embedded in the classroom, can be invigorating and move professionals into new roles;
- constant attention to serving the student must guide decision-making and new programs.

Although effective schools of the 1990s will have many of the characteristics of effective schools of the 1980s, they also will be qualitatively different. Just as instructional leadership has been defined to include the leadership of many in the school, so "monitoring student performance" will come to mean a wide variety of processes, mechanisms, and approaches that carefully refine knowledge of student performance. This new knowledge will enable teachers and principals to guide improvement and renewal for their schools and classrooms in substantively different ways. Educators will recognize that renewing schools means seeking new ways to serve students and monitor their performance.

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Titles Available

Levine, D.U. & Lezotte, L.W. *Unusually effective schools: A review and analysis of research and practice*. (85 pages, $10).

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